

Tree-destroying wasp spreads in Hawaii

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A non-native species of wasp that threatens the wiliwili trees found only in Hawaii has spread to Maui's remote south coast, a report said.

"It's terrible," Andy Graham, owner and manager of Nuu Mauka Ranch, told the Maui News. "Nearly every wiliwili tree out there that I looked at that has leaves has got it. The new leaves are just starting to come out now and nearly all them are now looking bumpy and starting to twist."

Art Medeiros, a research biologist, said that the tiny erythrina gall wasp may have been blown into the area by the wind or carried on cars or even on clothing. The wasp lays eggs on leaves and stems, creating tumors that Medeiros called "leprosy on plants."

"The first year, we got to thinking that area was safe, but now we see that nowhere is really safe," Medeiros said.

The wasp attacks the wiliwili and related introduced trees. The wiliwili, like many other Hawaiian plant and animal species, evolved from the few ancestral species that made their way to the Pacific island chain.

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